

TRIBUTES

DRAWER 2 MRS A. LINCOLN - FIRST LADY

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# Mary Todd Lincoln

## Tributes

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

## Justice to the Memory of Mrs. Lincoln

By George P. Goddard

THE recurrence of Abraham Lincoln's birthday affords a favorable opportunity for the people of the North to inquire whether they have been just in their estimate of the character of Mrs. Lincoln. Those whose memories reach back to 1860 will recall the prejudice against her which was apparent in the average Northern community, perhaps more particularly in New England. I was then a child in a small Massachusetts town where anti-slavery sentiment ran high, and the stirring happenings of that strenuous time are still vivid in my mind. Mrs. Lincoln had come from a slave state and presumably from a slaveholding family, and it was generally felt that if secession and war should follow Lincoln's election, there would be a divided loyalty in the White House. This may seem like ancient history, but it has a direct bearing upon the question whether this prejudice exists today in any degree, and, if so, whether it was justified by the facts. If not, it is high time to set ourselves right.

If we were to condemn all who chanced to be born and reared south of Mason and Dixon's Line we should find it necessary to rewrite much history. We should not forget that the record of the North in those days and during the two decades preceding the War for the Union, is not such as to fill us with pride. Attempts to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law, the treatment of William Lloyd Garrison, and the repeated mobbing of Abolition orators make up a chapter which we would gladly forget. These facts being beyond peradventure, we may well forgive Mary Todd the only offense proven against her—that of being born in Kentucky.

In addition to the prejudice against Mrs. Lincoln because of her Southern birth, there was an impression, soon after Lincoln's inauguration, that the domestic life of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln was not a happy one. This impression grew into a settled opinion, and unquestionably exists to this day. Unfortunately, it has been fostered and strengthened by many of Lincoln's biographers. But it has been positively denied by others, and it is only fair that the present generation should approach this question, also, with an open mind and a sincere desire to do her full justice.

### HERNDON'S AND WEIK'S BIOGRAPHIES

Unquestionably, the feeling that the home life of Mr. Lincoln was not happy was greatly strengthened by the appearance of

Herndon's *Life of Lincoln*, published some years after Mrs. Lincoln's death. Mr. Herndon was Mr. Lincoln's law partner and long-time friend, with exceptional opportunities of familiarity with the domestic life of the Lincoln family, his *Life* has had great influence in crystallizing the feeling against Mrs. Lincoln which already existed. In the preparation of this biography Mr. Herndon was assisted by Mr. Jesse W. Weik, who has within the past two years published a biography of Mr. Lincoln which is based almost wholly upon the earlier work of which he was joint author. It is most regrettable that Mr. Weik seems to have paid no attention to the evidence upon the other side of the question.

All that has been written by Messrs. Herndon and Weik, jointly and severally, should be read in the light of Dr. William E. Barton's characterization of Mr. Herndon in his remarkable book *The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln*. Dr. Barton writes: "His life possesses many contradictions. He was an ardent temperance man, and a drunkard. He loved Lincoln with passionate admiration, and is remembered as the chief of sinners among his traducers."

No one can read Herndon and Weik's biography without feeling that through it all there runs a vein of antipathy to Mrs. Lincoln. This should cause us to accept his unfavorable testimony only when corroborated by more trustworthy authority. As to his credibility I especially note his account of a wedding which did not take place because of the failure of the groom—Abraham Lincoln—to appear at the altar. This story is emphatically denied by Mr. Henry B. Rankin in his *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*. His statements are corroborated by Mrs. Lincoln's sister and half-sister, both of whom declare the entire story a fabrication and say that the only marriage arranged between Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln was the one which actually occurred. Mr. Weik repeats this story, though evidently familiar with Mr. Rankin's *Recollections*, as he makes from it an extended quotation.

### MR. RANKIN'S FAVORABLE OPINION

I have been greatly interested in Mr. Rankin's biography, which I consider the best authority regarding the personal life of the Lincoln family. Mr. Rankin is one of the few men now living who knew Mr. Lincoln intimately. He was a student in the law

office of Lincoln & Herndon, and was well acquainted with Mrs. Lincoln. He was with Mr. Lincoln when news of his nomination reached him, and enjoyed his friendship to the end. His father and mother knew Mr. Lincoln from the time of his arrival in New Salem, and were friends of Ann Rutledge and her parents. He is spending the evening of his life among his friends and neighbors in Springfield, where he is universally loved and honored. I quote from his *Recollections*:

I saw Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln in many and widely different situations during their married life; saw them . . . at the law office, during busy hours, in hurried consultation between each other on family, social, or business affairs; . . . saw them regularly attending church together every Sunday when both were at home; . . . with their children; with their friends, their political foes, and later with huzzahing party admirers filling their modest home and sometimes overflowing the streets around. . . . In none of these situations did I ever detect in Mrs. Lincoln anything but the most wifely and matronly proprieties and respect toward her husband, her family and her friends. She adapted herself cheerfully to all those exacting functions at their home required of Lincoln in his public life.

It is well known that Mary Todd, soon after going to Springfield, declared—perhaps half playfully—her intention to marry a man who would become President. Doubtless she had many opportunities to marry able and brilliant men, but Abraham Lincoln was her choice, and she never wavered in her belief that he would reach the White House. It was through her influence that Mr. Lincoln declined the proffer, by President Fillmore, of the Governorship of the Territory of Oregon. Mr. Lincoln was inclined to accept but declared that he would leave the final decision to his wife. She, with greater political sagacity, refused her consent, and the offer was declined. She saw that removal to a distant Territory would be fatal to his presidential ambition, and there is little doubt that she was right.

Only the Almighty knows what ills might have overtaken our country had any other man than Abraham Lincoln been nominated by the Republican party in 1860. If we owe his nomination to Mrs. Lincoln's political sagacity we can forgive her for being born and educated in a slave state, which seems her chief offense. History will eventually do her justice, but it would be far better to do her justice now.



# At Last! A Kindly Word for Mary Todd, Wife of Lincoln

By Mary Rennels.

WITH you, I stop my work, I bow my head, and bend my knee in reverence to the memory of our country's most beloved President, Abraham Lincoln. With you I marvel at his greatness, his gentleness, his reason and his courage. With him I suffer through the years of war agony. I shudder through the corridors of hospitals, I sit beside the beds of dying soldiers and gaze into their contented eyes as Lincoln guides them on to their eternity. I walk the lonely battlefields with him at night. I feel the weight of a war-torn nation resting on his shoulders. I stand with him heartsick before a venom seething audience and am stirred to awe as he reduces them to silence with his powerful passivity. I go into the

depths with him during the years of his reign and up again into the exalted realms that followed his victory. And in the end I feel the assassin's bullet pierce my heart and forever leave its scar upon the memory of the world.

AND as I worship before the shrine that with the years takes on a greater brilliancy and a deeper sadness—I do not forget the woman who stood beside this honored man through all his years of travail. I hark back kindly to Mary Todd Lincoln, who bore him four children, who with him sat by the deathbed and stood by the grave of two of them. I think that we should give a few moments, while there still is time, to thoughts of her who lies beside him, of her who was associated in personal devotion and services with him in all the great achievements we commemorate. Does it not seem to you that we owe something to the strong personality, the unflinching faith and devotion of the wife who was so loyally with him and an inspiration to him during all his strenuous years?

I have read many things about the life of Lincoln. I have heard many historians speak about our martyred President, and not one has dropped the word of kindness for his wife. It seems unfortunate that the life and service of a lady to whom this nation owes so much should have been tarnished by so much false scandal, calumny and neglect as has shadowed the name of Mary Todd Lincoln. At last, though, I have found her eulogized and paid her tribute as a worker and a devoted wife beside the immortal Lincoln.

HENRY B. RANKIN, who in his youth entered the law office of Lincoln and Herndon in Springfield, knew our President well, knew various sides of his character, his moods, impulses and anecdotes that are the knowledge of a few. These he has written in book form under the title "Intimate Character Sketches of Abraham Lincoln."

Here you find an entirely different Lincoln—Lincoln the personality, the individualist, the man with spirit and fire and, venom and moods; Lincoln, the friend of Walt Whitman, the jester in the corner store, the man weighted with problems of national welfare, with legal tangles having to do with straightening out the affairs of women of ill fame, with kindness shown to war mothers and most of all you find Lincoln, the father and husband.

One chapter called "Mrs. Lincoln in Lincoln's Life" does much to change the impression given to the world that Mary Lincoln was an overly ambitious woman, a virago, unloved by her husband and de-famed by many.

"Mary Todd came into Lincoln's life at one of its most important and critical periods. He needed far more than most men a refined and well appointed home. She gave him this to the most exacting details of neatness and punctuality. More than that, she believed in him and loved him devotedly. She had faith that a great future awaited him. She stimulated his ambition to work and seek the prominence he won. He

needed the incentive of association in so many ways and at many times with a wife of the superior and versatile qualities Mary Todd possessed in a high degree and in which he was deficient.

"Thus it was that in the first hour of his triumph, when he was elected President, though in the midst of huzzahing admirers—he disengaged himself from them and spoke gently, in a voice mellow with emotion, of carrying the news to her for whom most historians and biographers have had little but disparagement, or worse—silence."

AND isn't it strange that Mrs. Lincoln's outstanding offensive traits have lived after her—whereas her husband's good ones have become traditionalized by the same people? She has been referred to as "ambitious" and if that be a grievous fault grievously she has suffered for it. She was quick to speak her mind, they tell us—she did the little things, the tactless things, perhaps, that the world cannot forget.

But it occurred to me as I read this very interesting sketching of character by Rankin that as we revere and honor Lincoln's memory we should not forget her part in his life. In her last lonely and grief-laden years most truly from the depths of her stricken soul she must have cried out time and again, "Would to God I had died with him."

Rankin urges in her defense:

"Think kindly, gratefully, of her who, at last—after that fatal bullet stilled in martyrdom her husband's generous heart—was left to the loneliest life of all the wives widowed

by the Civil war. Give, even so late, that justice which the harassed, stricken nation unwittingly denied Mary Todd Lincoln in the busy reconstruction years through which she lived after her husband's death. She was allowed to go through these last years of her life, so lonely and solitary until their sad end, amid chilling neglect and misrepresentation. During the many bitter years following her bereavement it was her lot to suffer the daily martyrdom of her great sorrow under so many shadows until released by death.

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"THE Pen of History, in the long lapse of years, is a discriminating diamond-pointed one that engraves in the crystal pages of Immortal Truth the records of Undying Fame, those whose lives are deemed worthy of such commemoration. When that time shall come, if it is not here now, then Mary Todd Lincoln's part in the life of her illustrious husband will appear in its correct relation to his life, and she will be awarded the recognition her merits have always deserved. Till then she can wait; for, like her husband, she belongs to the ages."

And for further proof that these two were irrevocably bound it has been said that years ago Abraham Lincoln placed upon the finger of Mary Todd a ring bearing the inscription "Love Is Eternal," and then side by side they walked until the demon of tragedy separated them.

Lincoln was a modest man; he was fair. He has left us the gleaming example of his desire for equality. Hence he would want all benefits, all praise and admiration distributed equally. I have the thought that he would share your reverence, your devotion and honor with this woman so many have maligned, this Mary Todd for whom he cherished the name of "wife."

So with you, I stop my work. I bow my head and bend my knee in reverence to the memory of our country's most beloved President, Abraham Lincoln—and to his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, through whose heart passed the bullet that took her husband from the earth.



# NEWTON EULOGIZES WIFE OF LINCOLN

*Public Ledger 2-12-26*  
Brilliant Woman Treated Ungallantly in History, Rector Says at Union League Dinner

## TELLS OF IDIOSYNCRASIES

Abraham Lincoln, as inspired leader, moral mystic, orator, who spoke with the simplicity of the patriarchs; relentless logician, with character of more than feminine gentleness, was eulogized at the Union League's observance of the 117th anniversary of the great emancipator's birth last night in two eloquent addresses by Howard Benton Lewis, president of the Lincoln Club of Philadelphia, and the Rev. Dr. Joseph Fort Newton, of the Memorial Church of St. Paul, Overbrook. The auditorium was filled to capacity.

The addresses followed a dinner in the league by the Lincoln Club. Former Governor William C. Sproul, president of the league, opened the meeting. He introduced Mr. Lewis as the first speaker. At the conclusion of his address Mr. Lewis introduced Dr. Newton, who is a noted authority on Lincoln.

"Every people, every epoch has its classical man in whom its fate and genius are embodied," Dr. Newton began. "Unaware of their greatness, moved by some inner impulse, they follow the curve of destiny and after hearing the shouts of the multitudes behind them they learn that they have been great."

### Cause for His Greatness

Such was Lincoln, Dr. Newton said. One cause for his greatness, Dr. Newton indicated, came from a union of two opposing qualities—that of the clear-seeing, sagacious man of affairs, who deals with realities like Franklin and that of a man more imaginative, more sensitive, a humanist like Woolman.

"These two types of men found union in one supreme man; practical as Franklin and piteous as Woolman, master of relentless logic, but limitless in pity. In heart a fiery radical; in deeds a conservative.

"Yet," Dr. Newton continued, "Lincoln seems to have been made up of the stuff of the ordinary man. Separated, taken apart his individual qualities were ordinary, assembled in the man they became unique, profoundly elemental, original."

Referring to Lincoln's wife, Dr. Newton said: "What ambition he did not have his brilliant wife supplied. We have never been fair to her; she has been treated ungallantly in American history. We must try to undo an injury to a really lovely woman."

### Likened to Inspired Leaders

Mr. Lewis, too, compared the War President with the classical figures of the past and, summing up these characteristics, said Lincoln had the "patriarch face of Abraham, the inspired

leadership of Moses, the comprehensive statesmanship of Pericles, the courage of Luther, the spiritual eloquence of St. Paul and the fortitude and patriotism of Washington."

Lincoln's diction, Dr. Newton termed a literary mystery in its simplicity and with its flavor of the Book of Common Prayer. His manner of speech, he said, was not magnetic; he seldom raised a hand in gesture; his voice was rather high pitched and only on rare moments when he was moved did it descend to a semblance of sweetness.

He was a master in all the arts of the politician, too, Dr. Newton declared, and deplored that men do not gather about over the stoves and thresh out the political problems of the day as they did in the time of Lincoln which, he said, contributed to his political deftness. In every great crisis, though an ardent party man, Lincoln was never a partisan, Dr. Newton said.

To the interesting and historically valuable collection of portraits in the White House has recently been added a portrait of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln—the first to hang in the Executive Mansion of which she was mistress in the tragic days of the Civil War.

The portrait, made from photographs taken when Mrs. Lincoln was in the White House and showing her in the picturesque costume of the day with a little wreath in her hair, was painted by a relative of the Lincoln family at the instance of President Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln. Thru him it was presented to the White House, and it now hangs in the oval apartment below the Blue Room, from which the cloak rooms open, and which is used as an assembly for guests at White House dinners or for those who hold the coveted special cards admitting them thru the south door of the White House when receptions are given.

Mr. Lincoln was present when the portrait was hung, as were a few other guests. Robert Todd Lincoln has had a rather more distinguished career than is expected of the sons of great men. Being now in frail health, he lives very quietly at his charming home in Georgetown—one of those delightful old-world houses which give Georgetown its characteristic flavor, and which has been remodeled for comfort without any loss of its colonial charm. Mr. Lincoln also has a big place in New Hampshire, where he has been in the habit of spending several months each year. 2-25-1926



Mrs. Lincoln's Other Side

To the Editor of The Inquirer:

In reading books relating to Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, one invariably finds Mrs. Lincoln depicted as a churlish, domineering person, one who had evidently made up her mind to make the life of Lincoln miserable for his "leaving her at the church." In view of these many disparaging observations it is refreshing to run across a letter written in 1861 to N. P. Willis, which is written in a vein that would indicate that Mary Todd Lincoln had much of the milk of human kindness in her makeup. The letter in question reads: "Dear Sir. It will afford me much pleasure to receive yourself and ladies this evening. Of course anything that Mr. Willis writes is interesting, yet, pardon my weakness, I object to the 'motherly expression.' If you value my friendship, hasten to have it corrected before the public is assured that I am an old lady with spectacles. When I am forty, four years hence, I will willingly yield to the decrees of time and fate. Rather an indication, is it not, that years have not passed us lightly by? I rely on you for changing that expression before my age is publicly proclaimed. Quite a morning lecture, yet you certainly deserve it. Be kind enough to accept this modest bouquet from, your sincere friend, Mary Todd Lincoln."

As an admirer of Mary Todd Lincoln, I hope that you will be able to find space in your paper for this letter, which should put some of her many detractors to shame.

J. A. FINNEGAN

Philadelphia, May 6.

5-12-33

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# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.  
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## IN DEFENSE OF MRS. LINCOLN

It is a strange paradox indeed, which presents Abraham Lincoln as America's most honored citizen and his wife as a despised woman, but such is the case. An author writing about Washington society says, "It is the misfortune of Mrs. Lincoln to be the only woman personally assailed who ever presided in the White House."

A widely circulated magazine recently published a digest of a book which discredits Mrs. Lincoln to such an extent that much controversy over her behavior has been encouraged.

It is to be regretted that there has not been a more sympathetic study of Mrs. Lincoln's real character as it is evident now that she has been greatly wronged. Dr. W. A. Evans, by far our best authority on Mrs. Lincoln's mental condition, concludes that after the death of her son Willie in 1862, Mrs. Lincoln "should not be held accountable for some of her actions" and after the assassination of her husband in 1865 "she was irresponsible for her behavior."

These facts, however, are given little or no consideration by those who continue to abuse Mrs. Lincoln, nor do they take the pains to confirm the vast amount of purely traditional data which has found a place in the legendary stories about her. It is with these fables that we are especially concerned in this issue of Lincoln Lore. The defense of a woman mentally broken, as she was in the White House days, is not necessary. It must not be expected, however, that on a single page one can refute successfully the volumes of exaggerated and totally untrue statements which have been written about her.

Did Mary consider Stephen A. Douglas her beau-ideal?

If Lincoln and Douglas had not been political rivals, the names of Mary Todd and Stephen A. Douglas would never have been associated. There is no evidence whatever, that Douglas meant any more to Miss Todd than a dozen other young men who could be named. In her extensive correspondence of the Springfield days, she mentions his name but once and then in a casual way. George Fort Milton, Douglas biographer, admits there is no basis of fact for the purely legendary romance of Douglas and Miss Todd.

Is it likely that Lincoln ignored Mary for days during their courtship?

It has been alleged that Lincoln would let days drift by without seeing

Mary because she made him so uncomfortable by her criticisms, but a sister-in-law gives us this picture of Mary during the days of Lincoln's courtship:

"Mary Todd had naturally a fine mind and cultivated tastes. She was a great reader and possessed a remarkable retentive memory. Her brilliant conversation often embellished with apt quotations made her society much sought after by all the young people of the town."

Was Mary Todd left alone at the marriage altar by Abraham Lincoln?

The story that Abraham Lincoln failed to show up on January 1, 1841, and left Mary at the altar "bedecked with bridal veil" is a piece of pure fiction. Dependable students of Lincoln agree with Paul Angle who says "no such episode as Lamon and Herndon describe could have occurred on that day." Mrs. Frances Wallace, sister of Mrs. Lincoln, affirms that "there never was but one wedding arranged between Mary and Mr. Lincoln and that was the time they were married."

Was Lincoln's marriage to Mary Todd a tragedy?

One author says that "the great tragedy of Lincoln's life was not his assassination but his marriage." The many and the important contributions which the cultured and brilliant young lady from Lexington, Kentucky, made to the poor and awkward backwoodsman of rural Illinois can hardly be exaggerated. Edward Everett, upon his return to Boston from the Gettysburg dedication, in referring to a dinner in the home of David Wells where many distinguished persons were present, made this statement: "In gentlemanly appearance, manners and conversation, the President was the peer of any man at the table. 'Such social graces as Lincoln acquired and his correct behavior in polite society may be credited to the influence of his wife.'"

Can Lincoln's political ambition be traced to Mary Todd?

A Lincoln biographer claims that "Mary no sooner married Lincoln than she had him running for Congress." It is foolish to attribute Lincoln's interest in politics to Mary Todd. Five years before he ever saw her he had entered the political arena and no one doubts that Lincoln had his eyes on a Congressional seat before Mary even came to Springfield. She may have encouraged him in his political ambitions but he did not need to be persuaded to run for Congress.

Is it true that Mrs. Lincoln was so disagreeable that Mr. Lincoln never invited his companions to his home?

Mr. I. N. Arnold, a close friend of Lincoln's, says: "I recall the dinner parties given by Mrs. Lincoln in her modest and simple home. There was always on the part of both host and hostess a cordial and hearty welcome which put every guest at ease." Browning in his diary speaks of evenings spent with the Lincoln's, and Mrs. Lincoln herself writes in 1856 these lines to her sister: "I am recovering from the slight fatigue of a very handsome entertainment—at least our friends flatter us by saying so." Yet in the face of all this one author has written: Lincoln "never invited even his most intimate companions to dine with him."

Did Mary make her husband's domestic life so miserable that he would sometimes stay over night at a neighbor's rather than go home?

A close student of the Lincoln's home life in Illinois states: "Mrs. Lincoln lived quietly in her home, economizing, doing without luxuries, bearing and rearing children, attending to domestic duties, paying some attention to politics but otherwise letting the world go by."

Can the accusation be proven that Mrs. Lincoln never made a real home for Mr. Lincoln?

There were four boys born to Mrs. Lincoln. There was never a time when from one to three of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln's children were not at home. Mrs. Wallace said her sister (Mrs. Lincoln) "was a fine seamstress and made all her children's clothes, most of her own, and many of her husband's." One authority has put it this way: "The greatest influences of Mrs. Lincoln's life were wifehood and motherhood—home."

Did Mary Lincoln have a quick temper and a sharp tongue?

Most certainly she did, and no one has ever denied it. One of her relatives said "she was quick at repartee and when the occasion seemed to require it was sarcastic and severe." Possibly she threw coffee at Lincoln and drove him out of the home with a broom and probably he deserved it. It seems strange that the lawyer who would play pranks on his associates on the circuit, would suddenly lose all of his humor when he arrived home where three rollicking boys were waiting for him.



## Says Mary Todd Lincoln's Slight Alienated Herndon

Mary Todd Lincoln's refusal to invite William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, to her home when she entertained was cited yesterday as a reason for Herndon's ill-feeling toward Mrs. Lincoln.

"Herndon was not loyal to Lincoln, and Mrs. Lincoln knew this," a close relative of Mrs. Lincoln said yesterday in assailing "The Hidden Lincoln," a 461-page volume based on letters and papers of Herndon.

The book, announced Monday, quotes phrases such as "domestic hell" and "hell on earth" which were used by Herndon to describe Lincoln's home life.

"When Mrs. Lincoln entertained, she never invited the Herndons," the relative continued. "This was the reason why Herndon disliked her so strongly.

"Why, if it hadn't been for Mrs. Lincoln, Lincoln might never have

been president. I remember it being told by older members of our family how Lincoln was urged as governor of Idaho or some place like that. But Mrs. Lincoln stopped that. She told him he'd never be president if he took that job."

The relative, who refused to allow her name to be used, explained she "had to unburden herself." She added:

"Every Lincoln's birthday somebody hashes up these old stories. It is very unpleasant for those of the family who are living. First they put a man on a pedestal, and then they tell lies about him."

The relative knew all the members of the family but Mr. Lincoln, who had gone to Washington at the time this relative as a small girl first came to Springfield. She was very close to Mrs. Lincoln, whom she knew as "Aunt Mary."



## SPEAKER UPHOLDS WIFE OF LINCOLN

Feb. 10-1938

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—The naming of the Alton railroad's crack train the Ann Rutledge was "an insult to the memory of Mrs. Lincoln and in wretched taste," said Dean William Wallis in a Lincoln address Wednesday at Illinois Wesleyan chapel exercises.

"It should have been named the Mary Todd," he said.

"A lot of sickly sentimentalism has been connected with the Rutledge episode in Lincoln's life," he continued. "The idea that Lincoln's heart was buried with Ann is ridiculous. Within a year he was paying court to another woman, and later he married Mary Todd, a southern woman of aristocratic birth. It was true that she had a sharp tongue and nagged, but Lincoln was proud of her beauty and wit and was fond of her. Herndon's idea that it was a loveless marriage is unfair and untrue."

Dean Wallis, professor of history, reviewed Lincoln's life, paid high tribute to his genius and read a portion of the Second Inaugural Address as a revelation of Lincoln's greatness of spirit.

## FRIENDS OF MRS. LINCOLN

2-17-1958  
St. Reg -  
The State Register acknowledges many expressions of commendation of the editorial appearing in these columns a few days ago entitled "Honoring Mrs. Lincoln," pledging these columns to a discouragement of the spreading of gossip detrimental to the character and life of Mary Todd Lincoln and urging the press in general to decline to print such gossip published in book form or otherwise by literary racketeers. There is too much of the good, the beautiful and the true in the life of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln to countenance the publication of gossip, most of it imaginary and none of it based upon facts worthy of public or private consideration.

We like the comment pertinent to this subject made on February 9 last in an address on "Lincoln" by Dean William Wallis of the College of Liberal Arts, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois, before the faculty and student body of that institution. Referring to the drama in which Ann Rutledge played one of the principal parts (and she is beloved by all), Dean Wallis said:

"Just prior to his moving from New Salem, occurred the incident of his engagement to Ann Rutledge and her premature death. There is no question but that Ann Rutledge was a superior girl, and that Lincoln sincerely mourned her loss. But there has been a good deal of sickly sentimentalism expressed in connection with this episode that is not justified. To say as some have declared that Lincoln's heart was buried in Ann Rutledge's grave is nothing less than absurd. Certain it is that within a year, he was paying court to Mary Owens. She refused him three times.

"Later he married Mary Todd. She was a Southern woman and an aristocrat both by birth and breeding. It is true that she was high-strung, and had a sharp tongue, and at times nagged Lincoln. But Lincoln was proud of her beauty and her wit, and was very fond of her; while Mrs. Lincoln was inordinately proud of her husband and was deeply devoted to him. The idea for which Herndon is responsible, that the marriage was a loveless marriage, is both unfair and untrue.

"Recently the Alton Railroad named one of its crack trains, the Abraham Lincoln. That was entirely proper. Later they named a companion train, the Ann Rutledge. That was in wretched taste, and an insult to the memory of Mrs. Lincoln. The train should have been named the Mary Todd."

The constructive thoughts woven into the sentiment thus expressed by Dean Wallis are indeed timely. We commend them to speakers and writers while urging them to display some measure of devotion to the sacred memories of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln and Ann Rutledge, if you please, by avoiding statements savoring of the calumny which always poisons the darts of gossip.

# Urges Mary Todd Lincoln Memorial

Rev. Dr. Pontius Talks At  
Rotary Ladies Night.

Pictures on Page 2.

In a room decked with the flags of all nations, with the walls filled with hearts and valentines, Rotarians and their wives met last night in the Leland hotel, for their annual St. Valentine's ladies' night party. The program, which had been kept a surprise, featured music by the Sangamo octet and Miss Eileen Shuster, soloist with Bill Nelms as her accompanist.

Speaker of the program was Rev. M. L. Pontius of Jacksonville, who spoke on the "Truth About Abraham Lincoln." Of Lincoln, Rev. Dr. Pontius said his genealogy had been traced to Lincolnshire, England, and that the background of the man showed a lineage of prominent families. Most of his forebears were distinguished in their chosen fields of work. Thomas Lincoln, who has been called a ne'er-do-well man, was financially as prominent as the majority of settlers, and, Rev. Dr. Pontius said, owned two pieces of property, and "three suits, two of which were tailor made."

The romance of Lincoln and Ann Rutledge, he said, is overstated, and amounted to little more than a schoolboy and girl friendship. "Mary Todd Lincoln," he said, "although early biographers hated her, exerted a tremendous influence upon the mentality of Lincoln." He suggested that the wives of Rotarians create a fund to erect a monument "to the memory of Mary Todd Lincoln, who was the wife of our martyred president, and the mother of his children."

He noted that Mary Todd Lincoln died in the same house as that in which she and Lincoln were married, and he said that while much had been made of the supposed love of Lincoln for Ann Rutledge, nothing had been said or done for the wife of the Great Emancipator.

The qualities of Abraham Lincoln, Doctor Pontius said were that he was the master of two books—the Bible and the book of human nature; that he was a Christian, of whom not all are members of a church; that he was a great lawyer, and lastly a great statesman, not a politician. In conclusion he said conditions today might be entirely different if Lincoln were alive and had been present at the Versailles conference, and at the Munich conference. He predicted that in the next ten years, Chamberlain will be known as the Judas Iscariot of the twentieth century.

Charles Barber opened the meeting with a welcome to the ladies present, and the response on behalf of all the wives of the Rotarians was made by Mrs. Ronald Graham. Al Guest was in charge of several groups of songs by the Sangamo octet, which led in group singing of "America." J. Ralph Tobin, president of the club, presided and acted as toastmaster.

Ill. Jour. 2/14/39



# Mary Todd Lincoln Should Be Remembered for Many Kind Acts, Chenery Says

2-27-38 Ill. State Register

## Protests Against Stories of High Temper of Martyred President's Wife; Cites Kindness to Dallman Family as Instance of Interest in Neighbors and Friends

By WILLIAM DODD CHENERY

On February 9 there appeared in the first editorial column of the Illinois State Register an article headed "Honoring Mrs. Lincoln" that protested against the printing of rumors regarding the alleged high temper of Mrs. Lincoln, and that said in part in the closing paragraph: "Respect for Mrs. Lincoln ought prompt the press to decline to repeat those stories. We pledge avoidance in the future."

That entire eloquently written editorial causes one to wonder why the countless friends of Mary Todd Lincoln did not record the innumerable kindly acts shown by her to neighbors, and also mention the love and devotion for her family—traits inherited by her son, Robert. Herein will be recalled words of praise for Mrs. Lincoln that this writer heard from the lips of one to whom loving attentions were paid by Mrs. Lincoln.

Immediately after the breaking out of the Civil war the women of Springfield organized the "Soldiers Ladies Aid Society," fore-runner of the present day Red Cross Society, in the auditorium of the "Town Clock Church," the Baptist church on corner of Adams and Seventh streets. Twenty years or more after the close of the war those women, elderly and reminiscent, reorganized for purely social purposes, meeting at the homes of the various members for monthly evening dinners. The mother of this writer was the secretary of the opening meeting of that Civil war period, and recently among her papers was found a history of that Society that would make an interesting article in itself.

### Tells of Lincoln's Kindness

One summer afternoon in the early nineties the society held a picnic in the home grounds of my mother. Among them was a petite, dainty little lady, whose auburn-brown hair was just faintly streaked with grey, and whose speaking voice held the clearness of a silver bell. It was Harriet Waters Dallman (Mrs. Charles Dallman), mother of Alice Dallman (Mrs. John W. Cobbs) and Vincent Young Dallman, Sr., now editor of the State Register. This is the story she related—vaguely told from my memory:

The middle of the last century was a period when ambitious young men and young women of the British Isles sought to better their prospects by emigrating to the Land of Promise. In England, a youthful, but skilled architect, Charles Dallman, and his close friend, John W. Young, decided to go to America. Mr. Dallman to make the journey first, select a location and then send back for Mr. Young, and for his English sweetheart, Harriet Waters. In 1850 he

reached Springfield, established a prosperous business firm of architects and builders, in partnership with Alexander Graham, and was joined by his bride-to-be, Harriet Waters.

### Resided Near Lincolns.

"The Dallmans made their first home in a red brick bungalow that then stood on the north side of Jackson street, a few doors west of Eighth street and only a stone-throw from the Lincoln home, just around the corner. On April 4, 1853, Tad Lincoln was born. About this same date came the second child, Charles, to the Dallman couple. Mrs. Dallman was at that time unable to nurse her baby. When Mrs. Lincoln heard of that fact she sent her husband over to the Dallman home and had him bring the infant to her for nursing, and continued to do so for the necessary time.

Mrs. Dallman, who died in 1916 aged 85, told me a very graphic story with tear-dimmed eyes, how the tall, gaunt figure of Abraham Lincoln came across the street from the Lincoln Home, knocked at her door, entered with gentle step so as not to disturb the sick mother, and then gathered up the little mite of a newborn child into his big brawny hands, formed like a basket for that purpose, and carried the infant across the street. Soon he would return in that same eloquent silence with a tender expression of profound sympathy upon his picturesque countenance as he deposited the little child in a cradle. Often, she said, this humanitarian whose life later gave inspiration to the world, would sit beside the cradle and rock it gently with his toe as he seemed to be in deep meditation about some great problem of human service that he was planning to render.

The baby died in early childhood

and its funeral gave another opportunity to display the kindly character of Mrs. Lincoln, for upon the return of the Dallman family from the funeral Mrs. Lincoln send over by her husband a generous supper, on a large tray, set out with some of her choicest silver.

### Helped Build State House

Other incidents in the career of Charles Dallman are worthy of permanent record. The first state house (present Court House) was many years in building. According to Paul Angle's history of Springfield, "Here I Have Lived", it was not entirely completed till 1853. Among the last

portions to be finished was the replacing of a temporary stairway by one of solid walnut. The railing and spindles of the permanent stairway were turned on lathes in the carpenter shop of Dallman and Graham, located at 909 East Monroe street. That historic old carpenter shop where many of the early residences of Springfield were planned and where doors and window sash were made by hand, was razed years ago. It was located on what is now a vacant lot just west of the Kinsella paint and varnish works. Just across the street, at the southwest corner of Tenth and Monroe streets, the old Wabash station was located where Abraham Lincoln delivered his immortal "Farewell Address."

Another contact of Charles Dallman with the Lincoln family was when, in 1856, Mrs. Lincoln wanted to surprise her husband by having the story and a half homestead made into a full two story house. According to Angle's record, the contract was let by her to the building firm of Hannan and Ragsdale for a sum of \$1,300. According to Mrs. Dallman's recollections in order to complete it in Mr. Lincoln's absence, they secured the assistance also of Dallman and Graham. Both these men personally worked on the rebuilding. For many years Mrs. Dallman had a photograph showing Mr. Graham standing on a ladder against the Lincoln home, taken during its rebuilding. Some relic seeker "acquired" that photograph, greatly to Mrs. Dallman's regret.

There were eleven Dallman children, born during a long period. Of these two survive, Alice Dallman Cobbs, the seventh child (a school mate of this writer), and Vincent Young Dallman, the youngest or eleventh child, named for his father's English friend of boyhood days, Vincent Young, and the editor of The Illinois State Register. Accompanying this article is a cut made from a photograph of Charles Dallman wearing the official black and white rosette which the Mayor and all city officials wore at the time of the funeral of Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Dallman was at that time a member of the city council of Springfield. He was in the city council as alderman from the old Fourth Ward in 1864, 1865 and 1866. The Mayor in 1864 was John S. Vredenburg, in 1865 Thomas J. Dennis and in 1866 John S. Bradford.

The members of the city council in 1865 at the time of the Lincoln funeral were:

First Ward—James P. Broadwell,



Henry Wahlgamuth and Ralph J. Coats.

Second Ward—Thomas M. Rippon, William Bishop and Moses K. Anderson.

Third Ward—James D. Brown, Daniel Morse and William S. Curry.

Fourth Ward—Charles R. Post, Charles Dallman and H. C. Myers.

This writer cites the above facts in which Lincoln and Mrs. Lincoln are the principal figures to show that only domestic tranquility could prevail in a home where such friendship and love was displayed for a sick neighbor—a mother and her baby.

Historians are compiling much material to sustain the impression of the Lincoln home which this dramatic story stresses.

Tribute is here paid to the magnificent work done by Paul Angle in writing "Here I Have Lived." In my opinion it is the most readable, and one of the most authentic, histories ever written about any city. It ought to be in every home in Springfield; every school child ought to use it in school, to thoroughly appreciate the astonishing early history of the capital of Illinois.



**CHARLES DALLMAN**

Pioneer builder and city alderman, wearing black and white rosette donned by city officials for Lincoln funeral.

# Prejudice And Hatred Mar Memory Of Mary T. Lincoln

By BEULAH GORDON.  
Staff Writer.

Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the president—what manner of woman was she?

A legendary figure in the town where she was married and where her children were born, she is still obscured by a miasma of hate and prejudice that has survived the envenomed bitterness of the war between states.

Mrs. H. E. Fullenwider, 2401 South Seventh street, believes that Springfield women should band themselves together in an organization to perpetuate the memory of the wife of Abraham Lincoln.

"The more I read from informed sources about Mary Todd Lincoln," Mrs. Fullenwider says, "the more I am convinced she was an accomplished and brilliant woman, devoted to her husband, and loved by him in turn.

"Rather than a sharp tongued shrew who was a handicap to Lincoln as many historians would lead us to believe, I think she was a great aid and comfort to the president, and was instrumental in putting him in the White House.

"She was undoubtedly high tempered, and her determination not to be imposed upon or allow her husband to be, made her many enemies, including Stanton and Seward, who spread abroad poisonous detractions. Herndon had a personal grudge against her, and

in his 'Life of Lincoln,' found a vent for his deep prejudice.

"Mrs. Elizabeth Keckley, her colored seamstress and confident, in her book, 'Behind the Scenes,' which seems entirely authentic, speaks of her deep devotion to the president, and his affection for her. She tells of the love of the colored people for her as does John Washington in his recent book, 'They Knew Lincoln.'

"Honore Morrow in her book 'Mary Todd Lincoln,' depicts the Washington hatred and intrigue the wife of the president was called upon to bear, and the unjust accusations that were made against her on every side.

"I don't think Lincoln would appreciate having his wife and the mother of his children belittled and maligned. If Springfield ever has a municipal auditorium I feel 'Mary Todd Lincoln,' would be a suitable name, and I believe it is time that Springfield women organized and came to the defense of one of the most brilliant and accomplished citizen our city has ever known!"

Perhaps Mrs. Fullenwider is right. It took an assassin's bullet to still the wild shouts of revilement against Lincoln, and after he was gone his wife faced the storm alone. There is much to say in defense of the woman, who in her youth was the belle of Springfield, and who came from one of the best families in Kentucky.



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## BEFRIENDS MARY T. LINCOLN



—Staff Photo.

Mrs. H. E. Fullenwider, 2401 South Seventh street, has done a great deal of research concerning Mary Todd Lincoln and believes she has been deeply misjudged. She feels Springfield women should form an organization to defend her memory.

## Mrs. Keys Recalls Stories Of Her Aunt Mary Lincoln

By BEULAH GORDON.  
Staff Writer.

"Aunt Mary Lincoln was high spirited and no one could down her! She was keen and quick witted, bright as a dollar, and as good a woman as ever lived on earth!" Thus asserts her only living niece, Mrs. Edward D. Keys, 603 South Seventh street.

Possessed of the Todd wit, the Todd temper, and the proud Todd independence, Mrs. Keys is not one to avoid difficulties through appeasement. On erect, patrician shoulders she bears undaunted the weight of more than eighty years.

"I never yield one inch when I think I'm right, and neither would Aunt Mary," she said. "Lincoln would have had far to go to find her equal. She was kind and good hearted and did for sick people, and she was always loyal to her husband. Aunt Mary was abused, mistreated, and lied about, and I think it is a shame!"

Trouble never quenched the Kentucky fire of Mrs. Keys southern spirit. She was the daughter of Mrs. Lincoln's brother, Levi O. Todd. Her mother died when she was 5 and her father when she was 9.

When she was 5 and her sister, Ella, was 14, they came to Springfield to stay with an aunt, Mrs. C. M. Smith. But Mrs. Keys was so small and so homesick for Lexington, she was allowed to return, and lived with an aunt on her mother's side, Mrs. Susan Edge, until Ella married John C. Canfield, and sent for her sister to join her in Springfield.

In Lexington she was a pet of the mother of John Morgan, the

raider, and recalls sitting on Mrs. Morgan's lap before an open fireplace while that fond lady fed her candy.

She remembers standing on the outside steps of her grandfather's home when John Morgan and three of his soldiers came galloping up to be presented with a silk rebel flag by her cousin and two other young women who had made it with their own hands.

The women were dressed in red and white striped "Secesh" grena-dine, and she, a tiny girl, was attired in a frock of the same material and stood with them.

When she came to Springfield after the close of the Civil war, "Aunt Mary Lincoln," widowed and sorrowful, was planning a trip to Europe. Before leaving Mrs. Lincoln asked her niece what she could bring back as a gift and suggested a set of coral. With this suggestion Mrs. Keys, then Miss Todd, was delighted.

While in Europe Mrs. Lincoln purchased for her niece a white corded bengaline dress with a full court train. Tad admired it so greatly he urged his mother to wear the gown at her presentation to the court of England and she consented.

The dress was later packed in wax to prevent discoloration and given to Mrs. Keys, who wore it for her wedding. At the same time Mrs. Lincoln presented her with a traveling dress of gray plaid camel's hair with pin stripes in blue.

"Lincoln was proud as Lucifer of Aunt Mary," Mrs. Keys declared. "She met him at 'Aunt Lizzie's'—Mrs. Ninian Edwards, and said

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right away, 'That's the man I'm going to marry and some day he will be president of the United States!'"

"A member of my family received a letter the other day stating

that Mary Todd's old home in Lexington was to be sold and the people of the city were to purchase it to preserve as a national shrine."

As definite, uncompromising and

certain of her feelings as her famous aunt, Mrs. Keys sums her opinion of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln in one trenchant sentence, "I knew her, I knew her well, and I liked her."



## Reveal Mary Todd Lincoln Was A Kindly Neighbor

By BEULAH GORDON,  
Staff Writer.

*(This is the ninth in a series  
of articles on Mary Todd Lin-  
coln.)*

The critics who, for so long unanswered, pointed to Mary Todd Lincoln as a heartless shrew, have never told of her many unsought and warmhearted kindnesses.

There was a group of her friends, often quoted, who recalled Mary Todd's girlhood as the gay, witty and friendly belle of Springfield.

But there is another group, not so frequently mentioned, who knew her in later years as a wife and mother and remembered her always as a good neighbor ready to stand by in times of trouble and misfortune.

One of these was the late Mrs. Charles Dallman, mother of V. Y. Dallman, editor of The Illinois State Register.

When Charles Dallman left England to find his fortune in America, he came to Springfield and in 1850 set up a prosperous firm of architects and builders in partnership with Alexander Graham, and, thus established, sent for his petite brown haired bride-to-be, Harriett Waters.

Their first home was a red brick bungalow on the north side of Jackson street, a few doors west of Eighth street, and just around the corner from the Lincoln residence.

Tad Lincoln was born on April 4, 1853, and about the same date, Charles, the Dallmans' second child, was also born. Mrs. Dallman was ill and unable to nurse her baby, and when Mrs. Lincoln heard of this, she sent her husband to the Dallman home to bring the infant to her for nursing.

Day after day Lincoln called at

the Dallmans, and cradling the baby in his strong, broad hands, carried it to Mrs. Lincoln. His goings and comings were always quiet so the sick mother might not be disturbed.

Grief came to the Dallman family a few years later, when Charles died in early childhood. As she had in the days in the mother's illness, Mrs. Lincoln showed her sympathy by doing a kindness rather than in a mere formal expression of words, and when the sorrowful family returned from the funeral, sent over by her husband a generous supper on a large tray set with her best silver.

Later when Mrs. Lincoln wanted to surprise her husband by making their story and a half residence into a two story house, she engaged Charles Dallman and his partner, Graham, to assist in the work.

During the years eleven Dallman children were born, of whom two survive, V. Y. Dallman, the youngest of the family, and Mrs. Alice Dallman Cobbs, 1401 South Fifth street.

However much historians may weigh and debate the qualities of Mrs. Lincoln, she will always be remembered by the descendants of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dallman as a kind neighbor who never hesitated to freely give her help in the dark hours when help was most needed.



## Mary Todd Lincoln to Be Honored on Oct. 12

*News A, 4-22-43*  
SPRINGFIELD, Ill., Sept. 22.  
(INS)—For a quarter of a century Herbert Wells Fay, as custodian of Abraham Lincoln's tomb, has officiated while the world's notables from time to time have honored memory of the Emancipator by placing wreaths on his sarcophagus.

On Columbus Day, October 12, Mr. Fay, now 84 years old, will reverse that procedure and he himself will lay a wreath on the tomb of Mary Tod Lincoln.

It was Mr. Fay's own idea that this be done. Back in 1939 the American Pioneer Guild placed a wreath in Mrs. Lincoln's honor. So Mr. Fay asked the Pioneer Guild to sponsor the meeting at which he himself will place a wreath.

The ceremony, to start at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, will be dedicated to rediscovery of American home life. Presiding will be State Superintendent of Public Instruction Vernon L. Nickell.

From the original manuscript of the words the song "America" will be sung by a Negro chorus. This manuscript is a prized personal possession of Mr. Fay.

The address will be delivered by Former Congressman James M. Graham of Springfield, 92 years old and the oldest living former Congressman in the Nation. He will speak on Mary Todd Lincoln and American home life. State Director of Public Works Walter Rosenfield also will speak briefly.

## Wife of Lincoln to Be Honored By American Pioneer Guild

Springfield, Ill., Sept. 25.—(UP) —Herbert Wells Fay, 84, custodian of Abraham Lincoln's tomb here for 25 years, will reverse his role of officiating at wreath-laying ceremonies by world notables and himself will place a wreath at the crypt of Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the President, on Columbus Day, Oct. 12.

He said that the ceremony, at

which Vernon L. Nickell, state school superintendent, will preside, is sponsored by the American Pioneer Guild.

Fay, who met Lincoln when he was a child, said the ceremony will be dedicated to the re-discovery of American home life. He asked the guild to sponsor the ceremony because it placed a wreath on the Emancipator's

tomb in honor of Mrs. Lincoln in 1939.

James M. Grahn, 92, of Springfield, said to be the oldest living former congressman, will speak on Mrs. Lincoln, and Walter A. Rosenfield, of Rock Island, state public works director, will make a brief talk.

A feature of the program will be the singing of "America" from the original manuscript by a Negro chorus. The manuscript is a prized personal possession of Fay. Robert Taylor of the state museum will conduct the chor-





—Daily Capital Staff Photo  
**LADY OF LINCOLN**—Emille Helm, played by Thelma Fetter, offers words of encouragement to Mary Todd Lincoln, left, played by Melba Comfort, in a play presented Friday by Carmie Wolfe in her home, 1501 College.

## Mrs. Lincoln Given Credit in Play Here

BY SAM TEAFORD

Of The Daily Capital Staff

Regardless of what historians may say, Mary Todd Lincoln was nothing less than a sterling character—at least in a play Friday in Topeka.

Produced by Carmie Wolfe, former Topeka High School English instructor, in her home at 1501 College, "Lady of Lincoln" was five life fragments from the life of Abraham Lincoln's wife, starting when she was 10 in Kentucky and ending in the White House during the Civil War.

Players from Topeka Civic Theater and the Minerva Club told the story, written by Miss Wolfe, to members of the Western Sorosis Club on the anniversary of Lincoln's birthday.

Ruth Dunford was Mary Todd as a young girl, depicting her as a bright, happy personality who had great admiration for Henry Clay, the Kentucky statesman.

As a belle of Springfield, Mary was played by Melva Comfort. Trying vainly to choose between boy friends, she was as happy and friendly as ever, declaring, "I like everyone and I think everyone likes me."

A few years later, she encouraged Lincoln, played by Tom McGinnis, to run for the presidency. He was hesitant, but she told him to take the chance and rebuked him for underrating himself.

In the final scene Mary Lincoln, tho disheartened by the bitterness of the war days, was noble as ever. She was comforted by her little sister, Emille Helm, played by Thelma Fetter.

Clio, muse of history, played by Constance Van Natta, gave Mrs. Lincoln a closing tribute, announcing there never was a character in history more in need of a champion.

"Four score and 10 years—too late—I come to honor you," said Clio.

It was Miss Wolfe's announced intention to do homage to the wife of the Great Emancipator. Her play did just that.

An encyclopedia indicates much of the criticism of Mrs. Lincoln may have been unjust: "The facts justify the opinion that gossip has made far too much of their (Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln's) disagreements."

"She was unjustly suspected of disloyalty to the Union because she was from the South and because several close relatives were in the Confederate Army."

But the encyclopedia was as good to Mrs. Lincoln as Miss Wolfe's play. "Her serious disposition made her popular socially," it declared.

Renna Hunter, narrator, brought the scenes together. Clarice Belden as Adeline P sang two of Lincoln's favorite songs, "The Last Rose of Summer" and "Home, Sweet Home."

Others in the cast were Joe Rose, Marthello Booth, Carrie Rose, Mary McGinnis, Dorothy Lyle and Elizabeth Edwards.



## **A Friend's Tribute To Mrs. Lincoln**

By **EDITH S. REITER**

Following the death of Mary Todd Lincoln in 1882, a close friend, Jane Grey Swisshelm, paid a tribute to her in newspapers throughout the country.

Wishing to write of her as an historical figure to whom the people of the country owed a great reparation for criticism during her life, she found herself thinking only of an affectionate friend. Yet she was the inspiration of her husband's political career. The substance of the tribute is as follows:

In statesmanship Mrs. Lincoln was more far sighted than her husband, more radically opposed to slavery, and she urged him to emancipation as a matter of right, long before he saw it as a matter of necessity.

She opposed the appointment of Seward to a cabinet post, feeling that pride and disappointment would prevent any zeal in working for the success of the administration.

**MRS. LINCOLN'S** sympathies were with the radical abolitionists and that was the basis of friendship between the two women, when one held the proudest social position in the land and the other had not the means to get a second dress. The ground of their friendship was mutual sympathy with the president.

Whatever aid she gave him she never sought any of the credit—in her eyes his acts were his own.

Mrs. Swisshelm thought her friend's mind was permanently damaged by the shock of her husband's assassination.

**SHE LOVED PRETTY CLOTHES** but would have joined a society pledging to use no foreign dress goods during the war if the secretary of the treasury had not condemned the project because the Government needed the tariff revenue derived from importation of such luxuries. Although wearing of costly apparel was considered a patriotic duty it made her an object of envy and reproach to many.

After her husband's death she only laid aside her mourning garments on one occasion when, at the earnest entreaty of her son Tad, she wore a plain black silk dress on his birthday.

She felt that her widow's weeds were the external sign of incurable grief. No woman ever maintained the dignity of widowhood by more appropriate demeanor.

**DURING HER HUSBAND'S** term in office Charles Sumner was Mrs. Lincoln's closest friend and his cherished letters were read and re-read in later years. The last time Mrs. Swisshelm saw Mrs. Lincoln they spent an hour looking over Charles Sumner's letters and one was given her as a memento of both the writer and recipient.

On most subjects Mrs. Lincoln's mind was perfectly clear. It was sad that after talking an hour or more on political issues of the past and present, and showing her intimate knowledge of events, she would suddenly turn aside to some personal matter that showed her mind clouded for the moment.

**THE WRITER HOPED** the people of that day would do tardy justice to the widow of the martyred president because many unkind comments had been made.

Robert Todd Lincoln, her eldest son, lived to manhood, the others died young. He was a lawyer and public official who turned over his father's papers to the Library of Congress before his death in 1926. These papers were opened to the public in 1947.



G. L. Cashman

## MARY TODD LINCOLN

by George L. Cashman

In any close study of history, especially as it concerns prominent public individuals, one must inevitably come to the realization of the truth of Gresham's Law. This law, paraphrased, is "a good reputation is driven out by the bad." And, so it is with the Mary Todd Lincoln legend. A legend which incorporates distortion, half-truths and deliberate falsehoods, foisted upon an unsuspecting public by a vengeful character assassin, whose hatred of Mrs. Lincoln surpasses all understanding.

The malicious treatment accorded Mary Todd Lincoln before, during and after the White House years, is undoubtedly the blackest stain upon the pages of American history. Mary Lincoln was a woman of culture, charm, warmth and refinement. She was a loving wife and mother, and was responsible, to a large extent, for the success of her husband.

We have many published eye-witness reports with which to substantiate any claim that the Lincolns' domestic life was one of understanding and tranquility. The following is but one random sample of many accounts. "Mr. Lincoln's domestic relations were happy, and his devoted attachment to his home and family was always one of the marked traits of his personal character, in this quiet domestic happiness . . ."

Where gratitude should be shown to Mary Lincoln, we find condemnation and abuse. Her life was one of tragedy, she witnessed the deaths of three of her four sons, and the assassination of her husband. She had four brothers and four brothers-in-law who served the Confederacy, but her loyalty to her husband and the Union cannot be questioned. Her mind became clouded, but she was never insane, as some historians would have us believe.

It is true that Mary Lincoln was committed, as incompetent, to a private sanitarium at Batavia, Illinois, in 1875. As an inmate she was permitted complete freedom of movement, going wherever and whenever she chose, when accompanied by a nurse or a friend. Four months later she was paroled in the custody of her brother-in-law, Ninian Edwards of Springfield, in whose home she lived until her second trial in 1876, when she was adjudged sane and released. All of which would seem to create doubt that she was ever mentally deranged.

Shortly after her release, Mary Lincoln embarked for an extended sojourn in Southern France, where she remained until 1880. Her reason for going abroad was simply that having been branded with the stigma of insanity, she could not bear to face her friends.

On July 16, 1882, Mary Todd Lincoln, the woman who played a very large part in molding the destiny of the immortal Abraham Lincoln, died, in the quiet of the Edwards home, misunderstood, misquoted, misjudged and much maligned figure. Someday, Mary Lincoln may be awarded her proper niche in America history.



# A Mary Todd Lincoln buff revives her, after a fashion

By LUCINDA INSKEEP  
Louisville Times Staff Writer

"Mrs. Lincoln" visited Farmington yesterday to have her picture taken. Now she's headed for storage, and Helene Zukof's going to miss her.

"She's practically become one of the family," Mrs. Zukof chuckled. "First there was all the research and then, well, she's been lying on the living room sofa ever since last weekend because the closet rods are all too low for her."

The Mrs. Lincoln in question is actually an outfit, including gloves, purse and hairdo, identical to Mary Todd Lincoln's inaugural costume, copied down to the last detail by Mrs. Zukof and local costumer Louise Cecil. Their source was a copy of Mrs. Lincoln's formal inauguration photograph taken by Matthew Brady on March 4, 1861.

"The only thing that isn't exactly the same is the material," said Mrs. Zukof. "Her's has a floral print and mine's damask — old drapery material, to be exact — with the print in it the same ecru (a light, grayish, yellowish brown) shade as the fabric."

But there's no question that the details — from the velvet ribbon threaded through the fetching off-the-shoulder neckline to the modest shoulder cover-up of sheer lace — are of the Civil War period. Even the delicate crocheted lace trim was dyed in tea to give it an aged look, while the matching purse and gloves were lightly scorched by Mrs. Zukof's steam iron to achieve the proper patina.

Why all the fuss? "We were invited to Hodgenville for last weekend's Lincoln Days festival and to the ball, where the costumes were to be judged," she explained. "I figured everyone would be wearing 'Bicentennial' and that Mrs. Lincoln would be perfect. Besides, I think I've just about had it with Bicentennial."

Not only that, but the real Mrs. Lincoln has a staunch defender in Mrs. Zukof, of 3615 Glencreek Road. "Here was a woman people thought was so irrational, so extreme, going on buying sprees, throwing tantrums. . . ." (It's not known whether the cause was physiological or mental but Mrs. Zukof believes modern medical science could have made a difference.)

"Also, I doubt that Abraham Lincoln was an easy man to live with. Look at it just from the standpoint of their backgrounds — she was a member of a high-society family in Lexington and he'd never had money or social standing. But I firmly believe she loved him dearly and he loved her. If that makes me a confirmed romantic, then that's what I am."

Be that as it may, Mrs. Zukof also discovered that hoop skirts and crinolines aren't quite as romantic in the 20th century as they look. "You wouldn't believe how much this thing weighs," she said of the gown. "Or the trouble I've had going through doorways and up and down stairs. We had a helluva time trying to figure out how to get me to the ball, whether to rent a horse-drawn carriage or what."

Nonetheless, Mrs. Zukof and her two

hoop skirts, two crinolines, 10-pound gown and 2-pound, heavily ornamented wig were finally wedged into the back seat of a car for the trip to the ball.

"When we got there, one of the judges, a man who's a real authority on Lincoln, looked at me and said, 'Good evening, Mrs. Lincoln.' That's when I knew it was all worthwhile — I knew I was in."

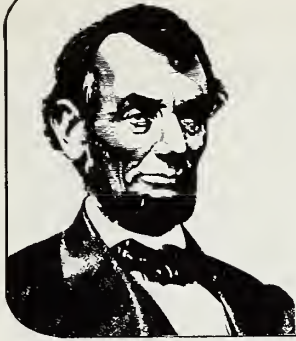
She was right. Her Mary Todd Lincoln was not only a belle of the ball, she won first prize. Mrs. Zukof said she could have danced all night, "but you can't dance close to your husband in a hoop skirt. Either he steps on the front of it or it flies up in back."



Staff Photo by Bud Kamenish

Helene Zukof poses at Farmington in a detailed copy of Mary Todd Lincoln's inaugural costume, with gloves, purse and hairdo.





# Lincoln Lore

January, 1975

Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation...Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor. Published each month by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Number 1643

## Abraham Lincoln Did NOT Defend His Wife Before the Committee on the Conduct of the War

We are witnessing a Lincoln myth in the making, and it provides a rare opportunity to see what cultural forces are necessary to promote to the status of popular myth one of the many obscure and doubtful stories about the sixteenth President. The event in question is Abraham Lincoln's alleged visit to a secret session of a congressional committee investigating rumors that Mary Todd Lincoln was leaking military secrets to the Confederacy.

### I. Origins of the Story

Lincoln's visit was first described in an article which appeared in a Washington, D.C., newspaper sometime after 1905 (the article refers to the "late" John Hay, who died in 1905). The author, E. J. Edwards, attributed the "anecdote" to Thomas L. James, who had heard it "at the time he was Postmaster General in Garfield's cabinet" from a "member of the Senate committee on the conduct of the war in Lincoln's first administration." Edwards's article continued:

"You doubtless remember," said the senator to Gen. James, "that during a crucial period of the war many malicious stories were in circulation, based upon the suspicion that Mrs. Lincoln was in sympathy with the Confederacy. These reports were inspired by the fact that some of Mrs. Lincoln's relatives were in the Confederate service. At last reports that were more than vague gossip were brought to the attention of some of my colleagues in the Senate. They made specific accusation that Mrs. Lincoln was giving important information to secret agents of the Confederacy. These reports were laid before my committee and the committee thought it an imperative duty to investigate them . . . One morning our committee purposed taking up the reports that imputed disloyalty to Mrs. Lincoln. The

sessions of the committee were necessarily secret . . . [Suddenly] at the foot of the table, standing solitary, his hat in his hand, his tall form towering above the committee members, Abraham Lincoln stood . . . The President had not been asked to come before the committee, nor was it suspected that he had information that we were to investigate the reports, which, if true, fastened treason upon his family in the White House.

"At last Lincoln . . . said:

"I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, appear of my own volition before this committee of the Senate to say that I, of my own knowledge, know that it is untrue that any of my family hold treasonable communication with the enemy."

"... we sat for some moments speechless. Then by tacit agreement, no word being spoken, the committee dropped all consideration of the rumors that the wife of the President was betraying the Union . . . We were so greatly affected that the committee adjourned for the day."

Edwards's article, the original title of which is clipped from the copy of the article in the Lincoln Library and Museum collection, was privately republished as a pamphlet entitled *The Solitude of Abraham Lincoln* by Gilbert A. Tracy in Putnam, Connecticut in 1916. A statement by Tracy in pen on the title page says that only thirty copies were made, and a pencilled statement made on the cover at a later date claims that only sixteen were printed. No alterations were made in the story, and it was published, according to the title page, by permission of the author.

The story would very likely have disappeared into the obscurity typical of stories from rare pamphlets had Emanuel



*Thomas L. James.*

Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City

FIGURE 1.



Hertz's *Abraham Lincoln: A New Portrait* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931) not repeated it (on pages 238-239). Carl Sandburg probably picked it up from Hertz; he did not quote Edwards verbatim, as Hertz had, but the story appears in the second volume of Sandburg's *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), pages 199-200. In a chapter about the events of late 1862 and early 1863, Sandburg said that "Senate members of the Committee on the Conduct of the War had set a secret morning session for attention to reports that Mrs. Lincoln was a disloyalist." The poet thus added to Edwards's anecdote a date and one subtle embellishment which will be discussed later.

Again the story seemed likely to vanish from popular consciousness. Despite the fact that it was ready-made ammunition for Mary Lincoln's apologists, the first of a long line of these, Ruth Painter Randall, discredited the account. Her *Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953) related the story but admitted that the "evidence is too vague and in part inaccurate . . . to justify an established historical conclusion that this incident occurred. One cannot accept Lincoln's words literally from such a long-delayed, indirect account and the dramatization is highly seasoned. The thought comes to mind that this story might be a confused version of Lincoln's interviewing members of the House Judiciary Committee in regard to the Wickoff-Watt imbroglio." Mrs. Randall had seen the story in Hertz's book, and then checked the original clipping in the Lincoln National Life Foundation collection. She used her sources scrupulously and threw cold water on the story, but her condemnation was mild and rather tentative; she felt that the story had at least the virtue of pointing "up the ghastly situation created by the idea that Mrs. Lincoln was disloyal." As a partisan of Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Randall wanted to believe it, but her respect for historical rigor prevented her from doing so.

Early in July, 1973, Connecticut Senator Lowell Weicker read Carl Sandburg's version of the story into the records of the Senate Watergate hearings and into the political conscience of the nation. Weicker read the anecdote before a national television audience to show that the first Republican President had been willing to give testimony before a congressional committee. Senator Weicker's staff may have picked the story up from the newspapers. Bob Cromie had printed the anecdote as supplied by Lincoln-student Ralph Newman in the *Chicago Tribune* of June 2, 1973. The story was repeated by Philip Warden eleven days later in the same newspaper.

This political use of the Edwards-James-Sandburg story gave it a currency that no attempt simply to dramatize Lincoln's beleaguered presidency or to defend Mrs. Lincoln's reputation could have provided. Almost overnight Lincoln's visit to the Committee became not an obscure anecdote but an important moral, if not legal, precedent. Weicker willingly quoted the statement that Lincoln "had not been asked to come before the committee." Senator Ervin, Chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee, never held that the Committee could issue a subpoena for President Nixon's testimony, and the Lincoln story was left as a moral example of willingness to volunteer information. President Ford has tacitly testified to the power of the moral example by appearing voluntarily before a congressional committee himself.

## II. Is the Story True?

To date, Ruth Painter Randall is the principal, if reluctant, challenger of the story's truthfulness. She noted immediately that the Committee on the Conduct of the War was a *joint* committee made up of members from both houses of Congress. Thus E.J. Edwards's original article erred in terming it a Senate committee. Here Sandburg's embellishment becomes important. He also knew the Committee was a joint committee, but the poet in him liked the drama and solemnity of the occasion. Although he did not quote the story entirely from Edwards (via Hertz), Sandburg did seize on such dramatic passages from the original account as these for their literary impact: "Had he come by some incantation, thus of a sudden appearing before us unannounced, we could not have been more astounded"; the president's eyes revealed "above all an indescribable sense of his complete isolation." Therefore Sandburg's quiet alteration of the original words "member of the Senate committee" to "Senate members of the Committee" is proof that he did not possess Mrs. Randall's

respect for historical rigor and discipline; he wrote what he wanted to believe and was willing to alter the record to fit it. In so doing, he also gave the story new life, for he thus eliminated the one glaring error which would have tipped off everyone thereafter that the story was based on very flimsy evidence. Even the most cursory glance at the multi-volume reports of the Committee on the Conduct of the War reveals that they were signed by House members as well as Senate members.

Sandburg, however, nearly made a serious error of his own by claiming that the Committee "set a secret morning session" to investigate the rumors. Edwards had said that the Committee's sessions were "necessarily secret." In fact, *all* sessions of the Committee on the Conduct of the War were held in secret. As a committee set up to investigate military operations during wartime, it could hardly have held *public* sessions with any hope of gaining testimony from the generals it interviewed. Edwards's version, of course, left open the possibility that *all* sessions were secret; Sandburg's version came nearer implying that this session was unique for its secrecy.

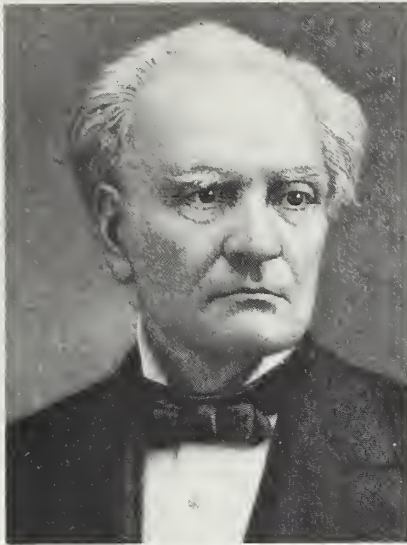
There are more reasons to doubt the story than these. Sandburg, probably for stylistic reasons, eliminated Edwards's remark that the anecdote had been "related to Gen. Thomas L. James at the time he was Postmaster General in Garfield's Cabinet." This time unconsciously, Sandburg considerably improved on the original by expanding the period of time in which the anecdote could have been told. According to the original version, however, this time was very limited, for Garfield was President for only six months, being assassinated in September of the first year of his administration. Postmaster General James, then, had to hear the anecdote from a Senate member of the Committee on the Conduct of the War in 1881.

*The problem is that most of these men were dead by then.* Senator Benjamin Franklin Wade of Ohio, Chairman of the Committee, died in 1878. Senator Zachariah Chandler, who also served on the Committee throughout the war years, died in 1879. Tennessee's Andrew Johnson, who served on the Committee only until he became military governor of Tennessee in 1862, died in 1875. Senator Joseph A. Wright of Indiana also served on the Committee for a brief period, but he died in 1867. Only two other senators ever served on the Committee. One was Pennsylvania's Charles Rollin Buckalew, who was not elected to the Senate until 1863. The other was Oregon's Benjamin Franklin Harding, who served in the Senate only after December 1, 1862 (he filled the seat vacated by the death of Lincoln's friend Edward D. Baker). Buckalew and Harding both lived until 1899.

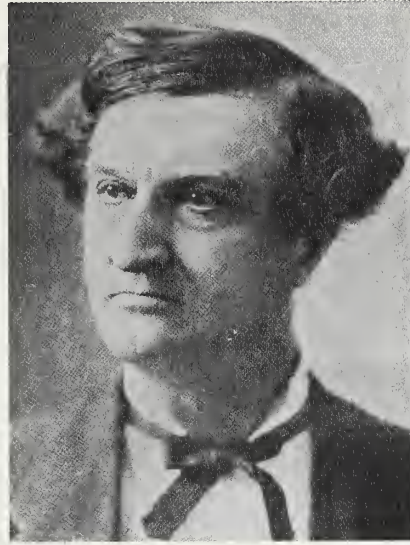
If Thomas L. James heard the anecdote in 1881 from a Senator who had been a member of the Committee on the Conduct of the War, he heard it from Buckalew or Harding. Buckalew seems an unlikely candidate because he was a Democrat. James was a long-time Republican, and it is doubtful that he had any special relationship with Buckalew. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War could meet without a quorum. In practice, this meant that no Democratic members of the Committee had to be present at the sessions, and critics of the Committee frequently complained that the minority members were ignored. It seems very doubtful indeed that Republicans would have invited Buckalew to be present at a meeting discussing rumors which, if true, would have doomed the Republican administration and probably destroyed the party. Moreover, Buckalew left the Senate for good after his one term. If James heard the story from this Democrat, either the Postmaster General travelled to Pennsylvania to see him, or Buckalew travelled to Washington, for Buckalew returned to Washington as a Representative only in 1887.

B.F. Harding, on the other hand, was a Republican like James; this fact increases the possibility of intimacy with James and the all-important possibility that Harding might have been privy to a meeting of such critical importance to the Republican party as the one Edwards and James described. However, Harding served only one term as United States Senator. According to a biographical sketch supplied by the Oregon Historical Society, Harding "retired" to Oregon after 1865 and died there thirty-four years later. He did not hold any national office, elective or appointive, after 1865. Unless James (a New Yorker) visited Oregon or Harding visited Washington, it is impossible for James to have heard the story from this, the only Republican senator who had served on the

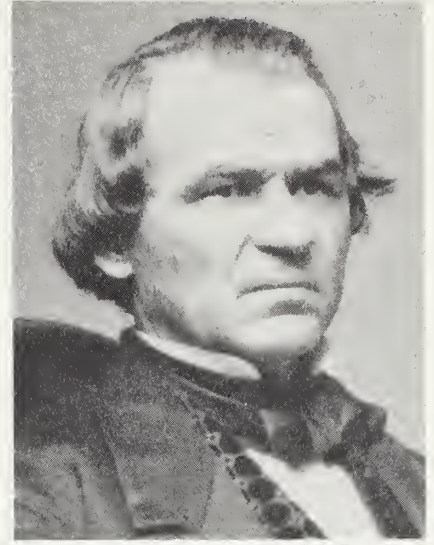




Benjamin F. Wade

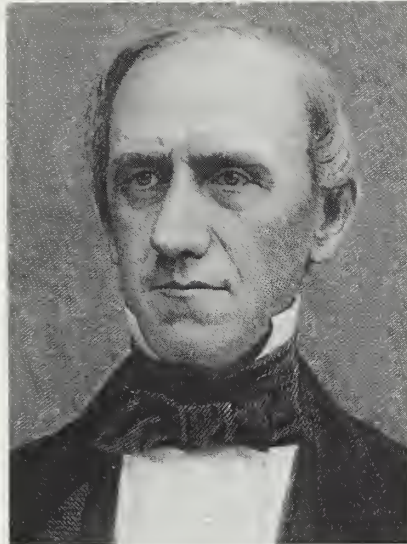


Zachariah Chandler



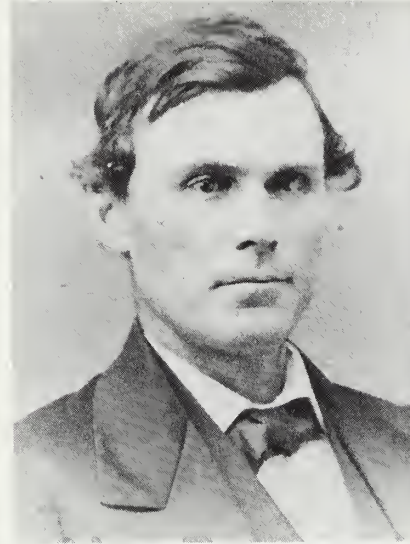
*Pictures from the Lincoln National Life Foundation*

Andrew Johnson



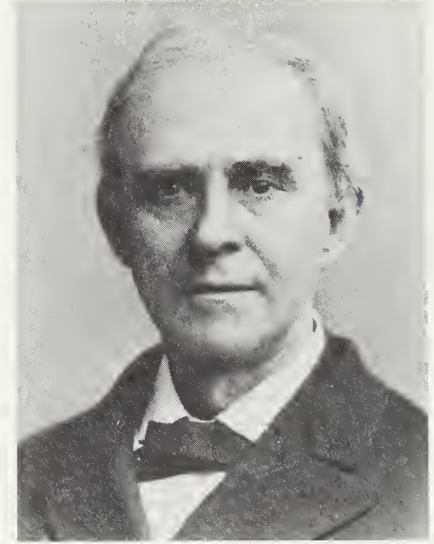
*From the Lincoln National Life Foundation*

Joseph A. Wright



*From the Oregon Historical Society,  
Portland*

Benjamin F. Harding



*From the Historical Society of Pennsylvania,  
Philadelphia*

Charles R. Buckalew

## FIGURE 2. COMMITTEE ON THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR, SENATE MEMBERS

The popular view of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War stems primarily from T. Harry Williams's first book, *Lincoln and the Radicals* ([Madison]: University of Wisconsin Press, 1941). Written with the flamboyance and combativeness of youth, *Lincoln and the Radicals* bristles with sharp characterizations and strong language. Members of the more anti-slavery wing of the Republican party are consistently called "Jacobins"; Thaddeus Stevens was "caustic, terrifying, clubfooted"; the radicals were "in the embarrassing, and often sinister, position of regarding Union defeats on the battlefield as helpful to their cause." Against the onslaught of these Huns, Abraham Lincoln was, "Like the Lucretia threatened with ravishment, he averted his fate by instant compliance." The Committee's popular reputation fell to such a low level that Harry S. Truman claimed in his *Memoirs* in 1955 that, when he was a Senator during World War II, he set up a congressional investigation in such a way as to avoid the errors of that earlier congressional committee, which had been "of material assistance to the Confederacy." Lincoln's image changed before that of the Committee did, and historians came increasingly to see President Lincoln as an assertive and adept politician who steered the country's course between the radicals and the conservatives in the party. Thus the Committee was still seen as malign in nature, but it was no longer deemed to have influential and inquisitorial power over Union policy. Hans L. Trefousse's article, "The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War: A Reassessment," *Civil War History*, X (March, 1964), 5-19, thus reversed Williams's view of the relationship between the President and the Committee: "In many ways he used the group, taking advantage of its impatience in a manner so skillful as to bring about great reforms despite conservative opposition." To date, there is no full-length study of the work of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, although the records of the testimony given before the Committee have been mined by numerous military historians. Such a study, especially if done with a careful eye to distinctions between decisions based on military considerations and decisions based on political considerations, would serve a useful purpose.



Committee who was still alive in 1881.

Examined closely, the story of the Lincoln visit to the Committee on the Conduct of the War vanishes after improbabilities are stacked on improbabilities. To narrow the evidence to manageable form for verification is a relatively simple task. Ignoring Edwards's mistake about the make-up of the Committee on the Conduct of the War, the curious student can very quickly show that only two men, one a Democrat, neither important figures in Congress or on the Committee (which was dominated by its energetic chairman), could possibly have told James the story. Both had been out of national public office for over a decade by 1881. The man in nearby Pennsylvania was a Democrat who probably would not have been present at the alleged session; the Republican lived a continent apart from Washington, D.C.

### III. Why Believe It?

The remarkable thing is less that the evidence proves flimsy upon examination than that no one has bothered particularly to examine it. Myths feed on a greater willingness to use a story than to study it. Over the years, the Edwards-James story has served several different causes.

Almost everything written to date on the Committee on the Conduct of the War stems from the period when the abolitionists were taking a beating at the hands of American historians and when every effort was made to delineate a gulf between those Republicans with abolitionist leanings and their President. Edwards's own anecdote was largely free of taking sides in the factional dispute. Edwards said nothing harsh about the Committee, and indeed the story is supposed to have come from a member of that very Committee. Yet it was easily adaptable in other hands to that anti-abolitionist animus, and it was to that factional end that Sandburg used the story. He prefaced it with a description of "the snarling chaos of the winter of 1862-63." Amidst mutterings of "a secret movement to impeach President Lincoln," Sandburg said, "Stubbornly had he followed his own middle course, earning in both parties enemies who for different reasons wanted him out of the way." Conveniently, the names of the "radical Republicans who took part in the secret movement, . . . could only be guessed." Edwards's anecdote, though this was not its original intent, was readily adaptable for those who wished to prove the unreasonableness and immoderation of Lincoln's factional opposition.

The anecdote was kept alive by other motives. Although Ruth Painter Randall's biography of Mary Todd Lincoln gave it more dignity than it deserved by saying that it at least showed the sort of problems this Southern First Lady could have, she rejected it. Her followers have been less careful. Irving Stone's *Love Is Eternal* (1954), a sympathetic account of the Lincolns' domestic life, was a novel and could therefore invoke the story in an effort to depict the unfairness and malignity of Mrs. Lincoln's critics (see pages 380-382). Margaret Bassett's *Abraham & Mary Todd Lincoln* (1973), also a sympathetic account of Mrs. Lincoln, cited Mrs. Randall's book in the bibliography but nevertheless said that Mary Todd's character "became so much a public issue that the President was impelled to say to Congress that he guaranteed his wife's loyalty." Ishbel Ross also noted "a deep debt of gratitude to the late Ruth Painter Randall" for her sympathetic research on Mrs. Lincoln. Nevertheless, Ms. Ross's *The President's Wife: Mary Todd Lincoln* (1973) states that "It has become legendary that when he [Lincoln] heard what was afoot, he walked alone to the Capitol and appeared suddenly before the committee."

There are doubtless two forces at work here, perhaps indistinguishably. One reason for the relatively new desire to believe the best of Mary Todd and the worst of her enemies is the feminist movement which is causing a great deal of interest in the role of women in history and which allows us, for example, to see Mary Todd Lincoln's interest in politics as a forward-looking escape from the nineteenth-century female stereotype rather than as an inappropriate meddlesomeness. At the same time, some authors use the story for the sake of an almost Victorian sentimentalism, replacing the First Lady on her dignified pedestal far from the vulgar vipers in Congress. Neither form of Mary Lincoln apologetics, however, was strong enough on its own to launch the story to national popular mythic status.

That leap required powerful political motives, by which I do

not necessarily mean "party" motive (Senator Weicker is, or was, a member of the same party as Presidents Lincoln and Nixon). The fact of the matter is, nevertheless, that the anecdote was again useful to those who wished a standard of presidential accountability different from that of the incumbent President's. Use was still the criterion, and not intellectual curiosity. After President Nixon suggested a parallel between his own beleaguered presidency and Lincoln's, *Time* magazine's Hugh Sidey (in the February 25, 1974 issue) could quote historians Bruce Catton, Richard Current, and David Donald that they found the parallel forced and selective (President Nixon's speech, they said, notably ignored Lincoln's reputation for honesty). Yet *Time* did not bring up a similar battery of Lincoln historians to testify about the alleged appearance before the Committee on the Conduct of the War.

The myth of Lincoln's defense of his wife before Ben Wade's Committee is based on flimsy evidence and a great deal of desire—desire to make the abolitionists look bad, desire to make Mrs. Lincoln's critics seem at once unreasonable and influential, and desire to prescribe a standard of political behavior for today's Presidents. Whatever the merit of these desires, no cause is well served by making precedents from shoddy anecdotes. We have been watching the birth of a myth; let us hope soon to see its quiet demise.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 3. Mary Todd Lincoln in 1863

Mary Todd Lincoln (1818-1882), daughter of Robert Smith Todd and Eliza Parker Todd, was born on December 13, 1818, in Lexington, Kentucky. Although there is little information available on the above picture, it was supposedly taken "in the autumn of 1863" and the print was "the right-hand image of a stereograph card published by E. & H.T. Anthony Company in 1865." Mrs. Lincoln is wearing the same mourning attire that she wore for many months after the death of her third son Willie in February, 1862. See *The Photographs of Mary Todd Lincoln*, (1969) by Lloyd Ostendorf.



# ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S WIFE

THE WOMAN AS SHE WAS, NOT AS SHE WAS PICTURED.

Mary Lincoln's Portrait Drawn by One Who Knew Her Intimately—Mrs. Shipman's Recollections—False Ideas Corrected.

I wish to say here a few words of Mrs. Lincoln, who has been treated for the most part, publicly and privately, as if to defame her were somehow to glorify her husband; whereas the contrary rather is the natural effect, for surely, if a man is known by the company he keeps, much more he is known by the woman he weds. The shafts that strike the wife pierce the husband also, and their offspring besides, for not only is the mother the nearest and dearest of earthly beings, but, under the law of heredity, her traits are presumptively those of the child. Did the traducers of Mrs. Lincoln forget that they were stabbing the husband and the son when they struck the wife and the mother?

I have often been asked, by persons who should have known better, if Mrs. Lincoln were not a light-headed, coarse, half-educated woman. Nothing could be further from the truth. My opportunities for judging entitle me to speak of her with some confidence. In her younger days she was intimate with my mother, while before, and especially during her husband's Administration, my trusted guardian and his lovely wife, Mr. and Mrs. Speed, were in constant intercourse with her; and in later years, during the trying period of her widowhood, I myself saw a great deal of her at close hand in a variety of circumstances. She was vivacious and mercurial, full of repartee and dash, but never unrefined, and though by nature light-hearted, was not light-headed. Her conversation and her letters plainly betokened the cultivated lady. She was perfectly frank



MRS. ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

and extremely spirited, and when she thought the occasion demanded it, capable no doubt of a cutting expression. To her native independence and candor of speech, I think, may be ascribed most of the actions and utterances at which strangers or mere acquaintances took umbrage. Those who knew her better understood that no offence was meant, and took none. A more affectionate heart I never knew. I have reason to know that many things said of her were due to personal animosity, and these, once gaining currency, came in time to be accepted facts; yet like the story of Mr. Lincoln's failure to appear on his wedding day, they turn out, after investigation, to be fabrications built on trembling sand.

As those to whom such conduct on his part must have been known, had it occurred, have disclaimed all knowledge of it, so those most familiar with the life and character of his wife have put the stamp of falsehood on the current stories to her discredit. For my own part, I can join conscientiously in thus branding them. The avidity with which mankind seizes upon evil report, against even its idols, is a sad commentary on its humanity. In this relation, I may be noted as a curious coincidence the agency which accused Mr. Lincoln of insanity at the dawn of manhood should have brought the same accusation against Mrs. Lincoln in the evening of life.

During Mrs. Lincoln's sojourn in Europe, was a bride, and saw much of her in London where she and her son "Tad," with his tutor were wintering. I was confined to my couch and she was my frequent guest. Her conversation, though always genial, was usually in the minor key, relating to her husband, her son Robert and his wife, their daughter Mary, her namesake, and the friends at home who had stood by her loyally throughout the striking vicissitudes of her fortune. To Robert and his family she was ever planning to send articles of use or ornament. In "Tad" she was wrapped up, and a manly fellow he was, too, and an aggressive American from the core out.

*I can well imagine how greatly you have enjoyed your goingsings in Europe & I truly hope, we may meet, whilst we are both abroad, you, with your life so filled with love & happiness, whilst I alas, am but a weary one, without my beloved husband present, the world is filled with gloom & dreariness for me. \*\*\*\*\* I remain Always truly yours Mary Lincoln.*

Nor was Mrs. Lincoln less diligent in the delicate offices of friendship, repeatedly bringing to my bedside, for example, the most exquisite bouquets, some of them sent to her by distinguished friends, one by Motley, I remember, who had recently been our Minister to England, and another by the Count de Paris, then sojourning in London.

Mrs. Lincoln, so far from having been half-educated, was, in mental training, intelligence, and accomplishments, quite equal to her position, and more than the equal of many of those who have occupied it. She not only was a good English scholar but wrote and spoke French.

Her individuality, as already intimated, was marked, and she had the courage of it. She shrank, for instance, from public curiosity, and, to escape it, travelled incognito on occasion. This may have been wise or unwise, but there was nothing in it morally wrong or socially offensive; and I can personally bear witness to her exceeding sensitiveness to the source of annoyance which she thus sought to avoid.

The summer before Mrs. Lincoln went to Europe my youngest brother and myself were at Barnum's Hotel, in Baltimore, where she happened to arrive the day after us, and, learning of our presence in the house, sent me her card. At the close of our meeting she asked if my brother and I would not accompany her to dinner, saying her two sons, Robert and "Tad," had gone back to Washington. We did so, and, as we entered the crowded dining room, "Mrs. Lincoln! Mrs. Lincoln! Mrs. Lincoln!" was heard on all sides, some of the guests so far

forgetting themselves as to rise from their seats and stare openly at her, she, for her part, covered with confusion, not unmixed with indignation, and seeming about equally ready to sink into the floor, and to turn upon her rude inquirers. Her extreme annoyance was plainly manifest.

And this was relatively a mild exhibition of the vulgar impertinence in which she was habitually exposed on her travels. Was there anything very surprising or very reprehensible in the harmless stratagem which she employed to avoid it?

The other aspersions cast on Mrs. Lincoln were even more unmerited than this many of them having been pieces of slanderous patchwork dashed with facts, and some of them lies out of whole cloth. None of them was just, and the whole of them together did not, in the judgment of any one acquainted with their "shining mark," amount to a serious imputation. Yet, without doubt, they had power to wound her. She told me in London that for long periods,

without intermission, she dared not read the newspapers lest she should come suddenly on some of these libels.

The public is sometimes swayed by a species of hypnotism, and in such cases when a notion, true or false, has once been insinuated into its multitudinous head, the suggestion becomes for the time a dominant idea, transforming and coloring all opposing ideas, no matter how correct or certain. Hence to serve the interests of truth history is continually unmade as well as made. In this way, it may have been, the ill-natured gossip about Mrs. Lincoln had its origin and acquired its currency.

During Mrs. Lincoln's later years, it should be said, ill health increased her sensitiveness to misrepresentation, and in turn, perhaps, as it was not unnatural, multiplied her detractors, to whom she was personally unknown. A case in point occurred within my own knowledge.

Some time in the latter part of the sixties I visited the family of Col. Taylor in Chicago. Before leaving Louisville, Ky., my home, I was especially charged by Mr. and Mrs. Speed to be sure, during my visit, to call on Mrs. Lincoln, who was then in Chicago. I expressed some reluctance, not having seen Mrs. Lincoln since my infancy, and being, to tell the truth, somewhat impressed by the stories about her; but my guardian and his excellent wife, who rated these stories at their true value, insisted that I owed it to them, and, above all, to the memory of my parents, to go to see her; and I promised. On reaching Chicago my friends there strongly advised me against calling, declaring that she had refused to receive or return the calls of the ladies of Chicago who had offered to pay their respects, and had treated the people of Chicago in general with such indifference, not to say rudeness, that a popular movement for presenting to her the magnificent residence of Col. Taylor in the city had been abandoned by common consent. I was discouraged, but resolved to fulfil my promise, and accordingly called at her hotel and sent up my card. To my agreeable surprise, she not only received me, but detained me far beyond the conventional limits, turning the call the next day or the day after. When I called subsequently I did not see her, indeed, but she sent me a card, saying she prostrate with a distracting headache, asking me to come to see her the following day at a specified hour, which I did. In short, here herself throughout as the warm-hearted, whole-souled, high-spirited Kentucky woman she was.

A simple truth is that Mrs. Lincoln at this time was in a state of health which incapacitated her for appreciating, much more for reciprocating, the civilities of the public. Her recent anxieties, acting on her shattered nerves, had rendered her morbidly suspicious, causing her to regard each stranger an enemy, as

he bird that hath been, buried in a bush,  
with trembling wings misdoth every bush.

Widowed in the most tragic circumstances, hounded in the midst of her grief by the press almost the world over, attacked alike in private and in public, and pursued by quidnuncs and detractors from one retreat to another, what wonder that her mood, under this terrible and cruel strain, was over-sensitive, with all that such a state implies?

In these circumstances she naturally did less than justice to the motives of the Chicagoans, and they knew nothing of her motives, or of her condition. The misunderstanding was mutual, but unhappily the consequences of it fell on her alone, and fell in the familiar form of personal aspersion. She was the victim of the circumstances.

The multitude set a high estimation on the homage they pay to individuals, and woe to the object of that homage who, no matter how innocently, fails to acknowledge it. In this capital point of popularity it was Mrs. Lincoln's fate to fail, but the failure was in no proper sense her fault.

I have said thus much of Mrs. Lincoln purely in the interests of justice, for, although she was the friend of my parents and of others dear to me, and my own friend, I have no interest in her at variance with that supreme one. Indeed, I might have said nothing, even under stress of this high motive, had I not recently been asked, not only by her contemporaries, but by members of the rising generation, if this, that, and the other thing concerning her were true or not. I have therefore felt it a duty to say what I have said.

Subjoined are two letters from Mrs. Lincoln to me, and a hurried note of farewell. Part of one of the letters is repeated in facsimile. The handwriting and the composition may be examined with interest by those accustomed to regard her as deficient in education, feeling, and refinement. A graphologist, if I mistake not, would trace in her chirography a character very different from that too often associated with her name.

ALICE D. SHIPMAN.

EDGEWATER PARK, N. J., Oct. 16.

FRANKFURT-AM-MAIN, June 29, 1870.

MY DEAR MRS. SHIPMAN: Although weary months have passed since your very kind and welcome letter was received, yet notwithstanding it has so long remained unanswered you have been very frequently in my thoughts, and I have been mentally wishing you such a world of happiness in your new marriage relations. Your letter early in the spring found me quite an invalid, and I have just returned from a long visit to the Marienbad baths and waters in Bohemia, and I find my health greatly benefited. I can well imagine how greatly you have enjoyed your journeyings in Europe, and I truly hope we may meet whilst we are both abroad, you with your life so filled with love and happiness, whilst I, alas, am but a weary exile. Without my beloved husband's presence the world is filled with gloom and dreariness for me. I am going with my young son, in a day or two, into the country to remain some weeks. If you will kindly write me and direct to care of "Phillip, Nicoll, Schmidt, bankers, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany," I will receive it.

The name of the gentleman you have married is too prominent a one in America not to be familiar to me, and associated with one so highly gifted as Mr. Prentice was. The gems of poetry he has written will always fill our mind and hearts with remembrance of him. Dickens too, has passed away. How much delight would afford me to meet you this summer, you ever hear from our amiable and lov friend, Mrs. Speed?

With compliments to Mr. Shipman and many affectionate congratulations to yourself, I remain always truly yours, MARY LINCOLN.



### The Sangamon Is Muddy

THE real Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Morrow has decided, was a somewhat maternal individual with a faculty for being blamed for things she was in no way responsible for. She was always most affectionate with her Ab'ham, but when those citizens began charging her with extravagance, with infidelity, with "making scenes," and with jealousy, Mary Todd Lincoln was at her wit's ends.

It is hard to believe now that the public should have said and thought the things about her that it did. But, for that matter, it is hard to believe that all the charges pressed against Lincoln could have been hurled about.

Roosevelt, upon his return from the first African adventures after leaving the White House, was wildly acclaimed by the American public. At the moment of his greatest ovation he foretold that not many weeks would pass before he would be distinctly "unpopular." He pointed to Lincoln as an example: when Lincoln was in the White House he was tremendously unpopular, yet, within two decades he was "the most wonderful man in America's history." Public sentiment swings to extremes. Roosevelt was a wise man.

## HONORING MRS. LINCOLN

An editorial appearing in this column under the above caption incident to this year's observance of Lincoln Day has been quoted in newspapers throughout the United States and has brought a most interesting and gratifying series of responses.

The editorial recommended a discontinuance of the printing of "gossip" uncomplimentary to Mrs. Lincoln and the presentation of her personal charm, good character and co-operation with Mr. Lincoln, beloved throughout the world.

A letter just received from Mrs. George Hunt, Crystal Beach, Florida, says, in part:

"I am very glad that one Illinois editor is the vanguard of vindication of our beloved President's wife, dear Mrs. Lincoln. I knew and loved Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln. Your article, 'Honoring Mrs. Lincoln' was sent to me here at my Winter home. My father, John Albert Jones, knew Mr. Lincoln intimately from 1835 to his assassination. The following day he called to see and sympathize with Mrs. Lincoln. Would my father have countenanced Mr. Lincoln as a member of our family in the home, and fondled his little children, if he were the vile man that the dissolute Herndon portrayed? For nineteen years Mr. Lincoln had a table in my father's office when 'swinging around the eighth circuit.' Mr. Herndon was disgruntled and engaged."

This writer adds that Mr. Herndon uttered his criticisms of Mrs. Lincoln to gratify his animosity, "for revenge, profit and publicity." She adds that "Herndon and Mrs. Lincoln were antagonists. He resented her elevating influence. She was her husband's inspiration and stimulation. Mrs. Lincoln is entitled to our country's adulation, not calumny."

In similar vein comes a letter from Frances C. Smith of Chicago, calling our attention to the reprint of our editorial in the Chicago Tribune. The State Register is vigorously commended for its discouragement of "gossip" derogatory to the life and character of Mrs. Lincoln. The very happy suggestion is added that all Presidents and members of their families should be accorded that full measure of respect which symbolizes genuine Americanism. It is suggested that malicious criticism and caricature is in very bad taste, to say the least.

The State Register is very much pleased to have awakened nation-wide interest in this subject. It is gratifying to know that the substantial thought of the Nation is in frank discouragement of calumnious comment about Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln and other Presidents and their wives and members of their families.

Political opposition is one thing. Malicious character-baiting is another. *State Register*



Little Statements About Mary Todd Lincoln

"I am sure that since the days that Mrs. Madison presided at the White House, it has not been graced by a Lady so well fitted by nature and by education to dispense the hospitality as is Mrs. Lincoln."

Ben Perley Poor in Boston Journal, Nov. 30, 1863.

"Mrs. Lincoln was born in Lexington, Kentucky in 1818. Her people were of Pennsylvania stock. Among her ancestors were some of the most distinguished men in America."

Dr. W. A. Evans, biographer.

"Mary Todd Lincoln was a linguist a super conversation<sup>a</sup>ist, a good writer - a woman of wit, mental quickness, most entertaining, and of great charm."

Dr. W. A. Evans, biographer.

"Mary Todd Lincoln was thoroughly educated and trained in polite society. No better educated woman entered the White House in the first hundred years of the presidency."

Dr. W. A. Evans, biographer.





(nee Wickcliffe)

Mrs William Preston of Lexington Kentucky,  
while visiting at White Sulphur Springs, ~~she~~ she  
made ~~some~~ ~~statements~~ <sup>some</sup> ~~statements~~ <sup>statements</sup> ~~about~~ <sup>which were published in</sup> ~~various~~ <sup>various</sup> ~~newspapers~~ <sup>newspapers</sup>. The article <sup>to do</sup>  
~~about~~ to a group of women. "Miss Todd had  
always insisted when quite a young girl that her  
husband would be President of the United States <sup>and</sup>  
~~and as~~ After becoming engaged to him (Mr. Smith)  
she wrote to her friend - - - - -

Mrs Lyman <sup>wife of the</sup> ~~Senator~~ <sup>husband</sup> ~~who was a~~ senator  
in the 34 congress who was in Washington during  
the session of the 34 congress convening in 1855.  
wrote a letter to a Springfield friend in which  
he made this statement

"I have seen a great many prominent  
women since I came here but I have not  
met any one so beautiful and gracious as Lizzie  
Brown or as truly a talker as Mary Lincoln.  
or as sweet as Sue Cook.

